

# Pulaski County residents turn to local sustainable farmers for

# HEALTHIER Food Options

By JOAN KITE

The narrative of modern food production reads like a spy novel.

In Europe, protesters sneak into university research fields and shred genetically modified crops.

In America, whistleblowers break into industrial slaughterhouses to film the horrors of animal cruelty.

And in Faubush, Kentucky, a former registered nurse, fed-up with chemically enhanced meat, learns how to slaughter her own hand-raised rabbit by watching a YouTube video at home.

Some people, concerned about the potential health hazards of processed and genetically modified food, are turning to local farmers for help. Feed us food we know is safe and natural, they cry. Besides, it tastes better.

Somerset, Kentucky is lucky.

Recently, people have migrated to Pulaski and surrounding counties to start sustainable and organic farms while farmers here have expanded operations to include sustainable farming methods. Many of them came together in last month at The Market on Main, Somerset's newest farmer's market. Participants included Jennings Hollow Farm, Good Life Ranch, Cedar Creek Farms, Solar Ray Farm, Heavenly Homestead Cheese, Old Paths Farm and Meadowbrook Orchards and Farms. On sale were cheeses from hormone-free cows, organic lettuces, tomatoes, herbs, bamboo shoots, cucumbers, bundles of mint, whole chickens and fresh eggs from birds raised in sunshine and grass.

"I liked the idea of knowing where my food came from," said Susan McKee, of Old Paths Farm. McKee is the woman who learned how to raise and kill her own rabbits. She is raising pigs, beef and goats, too. She sells juicy grilled



Geoff McPherson from Good Life Ranch discusses his products with a customer.



Jamie Aramini, editor of the website Sustainable Kentucky, organized The Market on Main in Somerset.

sausages at The Market on Main. "My pigs are out in the sunshine, eating hickory nuts, persimmons. Everything we've done is humane."

Public awareness of industrialized food production has been heightened partly because of risk-taking writers who investigated the food industry. Lindsey and Geoff McPherson, owners of Good Life Ranch in Casey County, said they started their sustainable farm after reading books like Michael Pollan's "The Omnivore's Dilemma" and Barbara Kingsolver's "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle." Pollan has detailed the dangers of planting mass crops of genetically modified corn, soybeans and cotton.

A genetically modified organism (GMO) is created by combining the DNA of two different organisms to create a new one. Genetically modified crops allegedly boast resistance to pests, weeds and harsh environmental conditions. Some claim these new plants, fed to meat we eat and mixed in processed food, is harmful. Videos and documentaries depict experiments of rats fed GMO food that show the rodents developing large tumors, seizures, and sometimes dying.

Enough studies, however, haven't been done to determine the effects of ill health on humans, said a spokeswoman from The Institute of Responsible Technology. In fact, few focused studies have been done at all. The U.S. Department of Agriculture approved GMO crops without any sure-footed research to determine their safety. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not require biotech companies to perform pre-market safety testing. Are GMO crops and food harmful? The truth is we don't really know.

"I'm not concerned about harmful effects of genetically modified crops," said Dr. John Settini, Eastern Kentucky University's chair of the Department of Agriculture. "It's like

creating a new species of plant.” Some Kentucky residents say it doesn’t really matter. Back to the land for supper.

“There is no replacement for Mother Nature,” Good Life Rancher Lindsey McPherson said. “We’re not removing anything from the land. The corn we’re getting is super nutritious.”

Aside from a diverse vegetable selection, Good Life Ranch raises animals untouched by modern hybridization, hormones and antibiotics. Docile Red Poll cattle, Kiko and Boer goats, heritage pigs, and Naked Neck chickens do their part on the farm – fertilizing, mowing and tilling the land.

Meat and plants raised through sustainable farm methods create healthier, more nutritious food, said Chase Campbell, of Jennings Hollow Farm in Wayne County. Campbell, a Georgia native, learned about good food working in the kitchens of Northern California. He migrated from stove to field devoting a decade learning about organic and sustainable farm method. Last year, he found the perfect plot in Kentucky to build his dream farm.

“I grew up being a hunter and a fisherman. I was always harvesting from the wild,” Campbell said. “I worked under quite a few talented chefs. I know what tastes good.” Campbell, a self-proclaimed “steward of the soil,” talks of hybridized chickens genetically engineered to grow quickly in an unnaturally short time.

“They get to be six or seven pounds in six weeks. Their bones can’t keep up. Their hearts give out and quite often they



**Good Life Rancher Geoffrey McPherson and ranch interns (from left to right) Mariana Vazquez, Trevor Antrim, and Bianca Lopez trim a goat’s hooves at Good Life Ranch.**



**Good Life Ranch raises all kinds of critters including Red Poll cattle and goats. The alpaca “guards” this herd from unwanted predators.**



**Lindsey and Dustin Perkins sell Terry Huff’s Heavenly Homestead Cheese, which is made from cows’ milk free from hormones or antibiotics.**



**Chase Campbell, of Jennings Hollow Farm in Wayne County, believes sustainable farm methods produce healthier foods.**

have liver problems,” Campbell said. “You have to educate the public. Your food is not safe. It’s a growing awareness. You have to vote with your pocketbook.”

If the crowd gathering at The Market on Main is any indication, then Somerset residents are casting their ballots for local healthy produce. Many farmers sold out quickly.

Somerset resident Shella Campbell left the market with Swiss chard, a first-time menu item for her, and kale from Jennings Hollow Farm.

“The kale was a lot sweeter and more versatile than that a grocery store,” Campbell said. “It’s been used in salads, greens ‘n beans, stir fry bowls and some juice already this week. We’ve been using the chard as a change-up from the spinach we usually buy, but this weekend I have a wilted greens dish planned...with some walnuts and nutritional yeast cheese cream sauce.”



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